﴿وَٱلَّذِينَ هَاجَرُواْ فِي ٱللَّهِ مِنۢ بَعۡدِ مَا ظُلِمُواْ لَنُبَوِّئَنَّهُمۡ فِي ٱلدُّنۡيَا حَسَنَةٗۖ وَلَأَجۡرُ ٱلۡأٓخِرَةِ أَكۡبَرُۚ لَوۡ كَانُواْ يَعۡلَمُونَ ٤١ ٱلَّذِينَ صَبَرُواْ وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمۡ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ٤٢﴾

﴿And those who emigrated for [the cause of] Allah after they had been wronged - We will surely settle them in this world in a good place; but the reward of the Hereafter is greater, if only they could know. [They are] those who endured patiently and upon their Lord relied.﴾

(Al-Qur'an, 16:41-42)

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The Early Muslim Migration to Abyssinia

by

Abdulrahman Kelani

The migration of early Muslims from Arabia to Abyssinia around 614 CE was one of the major events in the history of Islam. However, historians, both Muslim and Western, have not given this event much attention, either due to the scarcity of records or because it was thought to have had little historical impact. Even those who discuss this migration in their works, particularly Western historians, often rely on whatever accounts are available in the history books of early writers, without questioning the authenticity of these sources.

To preserve the teachings of Islam, Muslim scholars developed what later became known as the **Methodology of Hadith**. This discipline established the criteria for determining whether statements attributed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) or his Companions (رضي الله عنهم) could be considered authentic. This paper examines the migration to Abyssinia considering the science of Hadith.

From the early history of Islam, Muslims placed great importance on the Sunnah (the verbal and practical teachings of Prophet Muhammad, ﷺ). The early Arabs, known for their remarkable memory, preserved and transmitted the teachings of Islam through the narrations of the Prophetic traditions. Starting from the first generation of Islam, those who sought Islamic knowledge would convey the sayings and actions of the Prophet (ﷺ) to each other. However, not all these narrations were recorded in the first century. As the Prophet's Companions (*Sahābah*) spread across the Middle East due to the expansion of Islam, they carried with them the knowledge they had inherited from the Prophet: the Qur'an and his Sunnah. Many of these Companions settled in newly penetrated Islamic territories, establishing centers of learning in cities such as al-Basrah and al-Kufah in Iraq, Damascus and Jerusalem in Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria), al-Fustat and Alexandria in Egypt, as well as other cities in Persia and Central Asia, in addition to Madinah and Makkah.

The sciences of the Qur'an and Sunnah were taught in every mosque throughout the Islamic world. Students of knowledge (*tullāb al-ʿilm*) would travel to different regions to learn from sheikhs (Islamic scholars) who had narrations from either a Companion or from someone who had learned from one or many Companions. Such journeys were highly encouraged. Abū al-Dardā (رضي الله عنه), a

renowned Companion of the Prophet (ﷺ), once said, 'If one verse from the Qur'an leaves me perplexed and I cannot find anyone to explain it to me except someone living in Birk al-Ghimād (a distant place in Yemen), I would go to him."[1] Another Companion, Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh (رضي الله عنه, d. 78 AH), traveled for a month from Madinah to Damascus to ask his friend ʿAbdullāh ibn Unais about a hadith he had heard from the Prophet (ﷺ) concerning a matter in *qisās* (penal code), which Jābir apparently did not know.[2]

For centuries, journeys to seek knowledge continued until specialized schools in hadith were established in many parts of the Islamic world.[3] These schools were commonly known as Dār al-Hadith (House/School of Hadith).

Documentation of Hadiths

Undoubtedly, during the life of the Prophet (ﷺ), no scribes were assigned to write down his hadiths as was done with the Qur'an.[4] However, this does not mean that hadiths were never recorded during the Prophet's lifetime. In the early years of Islam in Makkah, when the Qur'an was new to people, the Prophet (ﷺ) forbade the Muslims from writing down his hadiths, fearing they might be confused with the Qur'an. Later, when this fear was alleviated and the Qur'an's distinct style and wording became very familiar to Muslims, the Prophet (ﷺ) permitted the writing of his hadiths.[5] Consequently, many of the *Sahābah* began to record what the Prophet (ﷺ) said and did. Among them were Saʿd ibn ʿUbādah, ʿAbdallāh ibn Abū ʿAwf, Samurah ibn Jundub, Jābir ibn ʿAbdullāh, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs, ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAbbās, and Abū Hurairah ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Sakhr (رضي الله عنهم).[6] Although some Companions documented some of the Prophet's hadiths, the majority relied on their excellent memory to preserve these teachings in their hearts and convey them to the next generation.

The *Tābiʿūn* (the generation that met the Prophet's Companions and learned from them, rather than directly from the Prophet) transmitted the knowledge from the Companions to the third generation, recording some of the hadith narrations they heard. The Umayyad caliph ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (d. 101 AH) wrote to Abū Bakr ibn Hāzim (d. 120 AH), instructing him to, "Seek out the knowledge of hadiths and have them documented, as I fear that religious knowledge will disappear and the learned scholars will pass away. Accept nothing except the authentic hadiths of the Prophet.

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[1] Subhī al-Sālih, *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth wa mustalaḥuh: arḍ wa dirāsah* (Presenting and Studying the Sciences of *Ḥadīth* and its Methodology), 16th ed. (Beirūt: Dār al-ʿIlm lil-Malāyīn, 1986), 54.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p.73
[4] The scribes whom the Prophet instructed to write the Qur'an were Abū Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthmān, ʿAlī, al-Zubaīr, ʿĀmir ibn Fuhaīrah, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs (in Madīnah), Ubaī ibn K'ab, ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Arqam, Thābit ibn Qaīs, Hanzalah ibn al-Rabī', al-Mughīrah ibn Shu'bah, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah, Khālid ibn al-Walīd, Khālid ibn al-ʿĀs, Mu'āwīyah ibn Abī Sufyān and Zaīd ibn Thābit. See Muhammad ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyah, *Zad al-ma'ād fi hadyi khair al-ʿibād* (Thr Provision of the Hereafter from the Guidance of Allāh's Best Worshipper), 26th ed. (Beirūt: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1992), 1:117.
[5] Adīb al-Sālih, *Lamaḥāt fi usūl al-ḥadīth* (Glimpses on the Fundamentals of *Ḥadīth*), 5th ed. (Beirūt: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1988), 58, n. no.3.
[6] Sālih, Subhī al-, 23-33

Disseminate this knowledge and teach it to those who are ignorant, for knowledge will only vanish if it is kept secret."[7]

Additionally, ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz instructed the renowned scholar of Hijāz and al-Shām, Muhammad ibn Muslim al-Zuhrī (d. 124 AH), to write down the hadiths he knew. The documentation of the Prophet's hadiths became widespread among scholars during the second century of the Hijrah. Among those who recorded hadiths were Ibn Jarīj (d. 150 AH) in Makkah, Muhammad ibn Ishāq (d. 151 AH) and Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH) in Madinah, Al-Rabīʿ ibn Subh (d. 160 AH), Saʿīd ibn Abū ʿUrūbah (d. 156 AH), and Hammād ibn Salamah (d. 176 AH) in al-Basrah, Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161 AH) in al-Kūfah, and ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Awzāʿī (d. 156 AH) in al-Shām, along with many other scholars in Yemen, Persia, and Khurāsān.[8]

The documentation of hadiths continued until the great imām, Muhammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH), compiled his collection of authentic narrations in his renowned book, which came to be known as *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*. Other hadith scholars, such as Imām Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj (d. 261 AH), Muhammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 240 AH), Abū Dāwūd Sulaimān ibn al-Ashʿath (d. 275 AH), Ahmad ibn Shuʿaib al-Nasāʿī (d. 303 AH), and Ibn Mājah Muhammad ibn Yazīd (d. 273 AH), also compiled their own collections. These scholars were the pioneers who laid the foundations for the delicate science of hadith *ʿilm al-hadith*.

Hadith Methodology

Hadith scholars (*muhaddithūn*) divide the science of hadith into two main categories: the discipline of *riwāyah* and the discipline of *dirāyah*. The first category, *riwāyah*, focuses on examining and scrutinizing the narration to understand all the details about its conditions, types, and the rulings concerning the narrators. The second category, *dirāyah*, pertains to the principles by which a chain of narrators is deemed acceptable or not. It also seeks to understand the hadith accurately according to established scholarly principles.[9] This branch of study is also known as the science of hadith foundations (*ʿilm usūl al-hadith*.)

The importance of studying hadith, especially *ʿilm al-dirāyah*, led to the development of several specialized branches of study, all aimed at preserving the hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ) and ensuring its authenticity. These studies include:

1. *ʿIlm al-jarh wa al-taʿdīl*: This deals with the evaluation of narrators' reliability and credibility.

2. *ʿIlm gharīb al-hadith*: This focuses on the interpretation and explanation of unfamiliar or obscure terms in hadith.

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[7] Muhammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Sahih al-Bukhārī*, (Beirūt: al-Maktabah al-Thaqāfīyah), Vol. 1, Book 3, no. 60. Translation of the text is adapted from the translation of *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* by.Muhsin Khān (Riyādh: Maktabah al-Riyādh al-Hadītha, 1981), 1:79.
[8] Sālih, Adīb al-, 67-69.
[9] Ibid., 72.

3. *ʿIlm mukhtalaf al-hadith*: This addresses hadiths that appear to be contradictory and seeks to reconcile them.

4. *ʿIlm ʿilal al-hadith*: This is dedicated to uncovering hidden and apparent defects in hadith narrations and narrators.

5. *ʿIlm al-nāsikh wa al-mansūkh*: This deals with hadiths that abrogate or supersede other hadiths.

Hadiths, in terms of authenticity, are categorized into three main types: authentic (*sahīh*), acceptable (*hasan*), and weak (*daʿīf*). Under the weak category, there are 17 subtypes, each with specific reasons for being considered weak. However, all these 17 subtypes are ultimately rejected.[10]

Based on the study of hadith, scholars can differentiate between the authentic and weak narrations of the early Muslim migration to Abyssinia. However, before discussing the Muslims' migration to Ethiopia, it is important to have a brief overview of the relations between Arabia and Ethiopia (al-Habashah) before the advent of Islam.

Relations between Arabia and Abyssinia Before Islam

Before the advent of Islam, contacts between Arabia and Ethiopia were already established, especially in the southern Arabian regions, where only about 15 miles separate Arabia from Africa. Archaeologists have found that by the 7th century B.C., "South Arabian culture was firmly planted in Ethiopia,"[11] to the extent that, "for the next several centuries, many aspects of the material culture of Ethiopia and southern Arabia were virtually identical."[12] Similar artworks, including statues and ceramics, were discovered on both sides of the Red Sea. Although contact between South Arabia and Ethiopia declined due to the decrease in the frankincense and myrrh trade, it intensified with the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian army crossed the Red Sea and occupied the region of Yemen twice, first in 335 CE and then in 525 CE, where they remained until 575 CE. The Ethiopians were eventually driven out of Yemen after the Yemenis sought help from the king of Persia against the oppressive Ethiopian rule.[13]

Geographical and Cultural Connections

Geographically and geologically, Ethiopia and southwestern Arabia share similarities in their terrains, climates, flora, and fauna. The constant contacts between the two regions led to a mutual familiarity among their peoples, cultures, and languages.

The Arabs referred to Ethiopia and its people as **al-Habashah**. According to *al-Mu̓jam al-Wasīt*, an Arabic language dictionary, the term **al-Habashah** is derived from the root (*h-b-sh*) and means "a

[10] Mahmūd al-Tahhān, *Taisīr mustalah al-hadīth* (Methodology of Hadīth Made Easy) 8th ed., (Riyādh: Maktabah al-Ma'ārif, 1987), 16.
[11] Gus W. van Beek, "Monuments of Axum in the Light of South Arabian Archeology," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 87, no. 2 (April-June 1967): 113-122.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

group of people whose races are mixed."[14] These races include the Semites from southern Arabia and the Hamites from Africa.

Muslim Migration to Abyssinia

Why did the early Muslims in Makkah leave their beloved city for a land they had never visited? Why did they choose Abyssinia as their destination? According to the Prophet's biography (*al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah*) by the historian Ibn Hishām (d. 218 AH), when the persecution of Muslims in Makkah intensified, the Prophet advised his Companions to emigrate to Abyssinia, citing its ruler as one "under whom no one is oppressed."[15] The character and justice of the Negus (Ar. al-Najāshī) were key reasons behind the Prophet's recommendation to migrate there.

Other factors contributing to the choice of Abyssinia included its proximity to Arabia and the absence of any formal alliance between the Makkans and the Negus. The distance between al-Shuʿaibah (Makkah's ancient port on the Red Sea)[16] and the west coast of the Red Sea (approximately 140 miles) created a natural barrier between the emigrants and the Makkans. Additionally, the lack of alliance between the Arab tribes and the king of Ethiopia meant that the Arabs could not exert influence over the Negus's decisions regarding the immigrants seeking his protection from persecution.[17]

[14] Ibrāhīm Mustafā and others, eds., *al-Muʿjam al-Wasīt* (Istānbūl: Dār al-Daʿwah, 1986), 152.
[15] Abd al-Malik ibn Hishām, 1:349.
[16] Shuʿaibah is located about 26 miles south of center city of Jeddah.
[17] Sāliḥ Aḥmad al-Shāmī,. *al-sīrah al-nabawiyah:tarbiyah ummah was binā' dawlah* (The Life of the Prophet: Raising a Nation and Building a State), (Beirūt: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1992),.112.

According to most Muslim historians, there were two waves of emigrants to Abyssinia. The first wave occurred in the early days of the lunar month of Rajab, eight years before the Hijrah (8 BH), or in the fifth year after the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an (the start of Prophethood). In this wave, there were only 14 emigrants: 10 men and 4 women, led by ʿUthmān ibn Mazʿūn.[18] After staying for four months in al-Habashah, this group returned to Makkah due to rumors that the people of Makkah had embraced Islam. However, when the emigrants arrived in Makkah, they found the situation worse than they had feared—the persecution of Muslims was more intense than ever. Consequently, a second, larger wave of emigrants was organized. This time, 82 men and 18 women set out, all led by the Prophet's cousin, Jaʿfar ibn Abū Ṭālib.[19]

Although the exact route the emigrants took to Abyssinia is not detailed in the narrations, there are indirect indications that they sailed from the ancient port of Shuʿaībah,[20] where they boarded two ships bound for Abyssinia[21] and landed at the ancient port of Adulis (in present-day Eritrea). Additionally, there was another route used by those traveling to Abyssinia. According to *Sahih al-Bukhārī*, ʿĀishah (ﷺ) narrated that her father, Abū Bakr (ﷺ), intended to migrate to Abyssinia when the Quraysh intensified their persecution of the Muslims. Surprisingly, Abū Bakr did not head to the port of Shuʿaībah; instead, he traveled south towards Yemen, heading for Birk al-Ghimād, an ancient port located roughly halfway between al-Qunfudhah and Jīzān (in the present-day Emirate of Makkah, Saudi Arabia) on the Red Sea coast.[22] When Abū Bakr (ﷺ) reached Birk al-Ghimād, he met Ibn al-Daghinah, the chief of the Qārah tribe, who discouraged him from continuing to Abyssinia, arguing that a person of Abū Bakr's qualities should not be forced to leave his city. Ibn al-Daghinah then accompanied Abū Bakr (ﷺ) back to Makkah, where he re-entered under Ibn al-Daghinah's protection.[23]

The events involving the Muslims in Abyssinia were recorded in many hadith collections. The most famous narration is that of Umm Salamah, Hind bint (daughter of) Abū Umayyah (ﷺ), who, along with her husband, Abū Salamah (ﷺ), was among the emigrants in both journeys to Abyssinia. According to the *muhaddithūn* (scholars of hadith), Umm Salamah's hadith is considered *hasan* (agreeable).[24] She (ﷺ) said, "After we reached the land of Abyssinia, we lived under the protection of

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[18] The emigrants of the first wave were: 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and his wife Ruqayyah (the daughter of the Prophet), Abū Hudhaīfah ibn 'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah and his wife Sahlah bint Suhaīl ibn 'Amr, al-Zubaīr ibn al-'Awwām, Mus'ab ibn 'Umaīr, Abū Salamah ibn 'Abd al-Asad and his wife Umm Salamah Hind bint Abī Umayyah, 'Uthmān ibn Maz'ūn, 'Āmir ibn Rabī'ah and his wife Laīlā bin Abī Hathmah, Abū Subrah ibn Abī Rahm and Suhaīl ibn Baīdā'. (See Mahmūd Shākir, *ma'a al-hijrah ilā al-habashah* (With the migration to Abyssinia), (Beirūt: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1987), 12-17.

[19] Shākir, *ma'a al-hijrah,* 34. The Muslim historians agree that the total number of emigrant men was 82, however, they differ over 'Āmmār ibn Yāsir and whether he was among the emigrants or not. If he was, then the total number of men is 83 not 82.

[20] According to the Yāqūt al-Hamwī's *Mu'jam al-Buldān* (The Dictionary of Lands), Shu'aībah is a port for ships on the coast of the Sea of Hijāz (i.e. the Red Sea). It was the port for Makkah before Jeddah. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamwī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 5:1051.

[21] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Fiqh al-Sīrah* (Understanding the Life of the Prophet), 7th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1976), 121-22.

[22] Zaki M. Farsi, *National Guide and Atlas of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, (Jeddah: 1989), map no.128.

[23] Bukhārī, 5:154, no.387.

[24] Muqbil ibn Hādī al-Wādiʿī, *al- Saḥiḥ al-Musnad Mimmā Laīsa fi al-Saḥiḥaīn*, (San'a: Maktabah Dār al-Quds, 1991), 2:527.

al-Najāshī, who proved to be the best neighbor (or protector) to us. We were safe in our practice of religion and worshipped Allāh without facing any harm or hearing anything unpleasant. When news of our situation reached the Quraish, they decided to send two eloquent and strong men to al-Najāshī, bearing gifts of what he favored most from Makkah's goods. Knowing that hides were the king's preferred items from Makkah, they gathered a large quantity for him and prepared gifts for each of the king's bishops as well. The Makkans then sent all these gifts with ʿAbdullāh ibn Abū Rabīʿah and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs al-Suhamī. They instructed the two men: 'First, give each bishop his gift before speaking to the King about the Muslims. Then present al-Najāshī with his gifts and ask him to hand over the Muslims to you before he speaks to them.' The two men set off, and when they reached al-Najāshī, we were residing in his realm, enjoying the best hospitality and protection. They presented gifts to each of the king's bishops before speaking to the king. Then, they told the bishops, 'Immature young people from among us have fled to the king's land. They have abandoned the religion of their people, but they have not adopted your religion either. Instead, they have brought forth a new, invented religion that neither we nor you recognize. The nobles among their people have sent us to bring them back, so when we speak to the king about them, please advise him to hand them over to us without speaking to them first. After all, their own people know them best and are fully aware of the accusations against them.' The bishops agreed to the men's request. Afterward, the two men presented their gifts to al-Najāshī and said, 'O king! Immature young people from among us have fled to your land. They have abandoned the religion of their people without embracing your religion, and they have introduced a new, invented religion that neither we nor you recognize. The nobles among their people—their fathers, uncles, and clansmen—have sent us to request that you send them back, as their own people are more aware of them and the accusations against them.' Nothing was more distressing to ʿAbdullāh ibn Abū Rabīʿah and ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs than the thought of al-Najāshī listening to what the Muslims had to say. The bishops then said, 'O king, these men have spoken the truth. Hand the Muslims over to them so they can take them back to their land and kinsfolk.' But the king grew angry and declared, 'By God! I will not hand them over to these men. I will not even consider such a thing. These people sought my protection in my land and chose me over others. I will not hand them over until I call them and hear their side of the story. If they are as these two men have claimed, then I will send them back to their kinsfolk. But if they are not, I will protect them from the Makkans and treat them kindly as long as they remain in my realm.' Then the king summoned the Companions of the Prophet (ﷺ). When the king's messenger arrived, the Companions gathered and asked each other, 'What will we say to the king when we meet him?' They agreed, 'By Allah, we will tell him only what we know and what our Prophet (ﷺ) has commanded us to say.' Before the Muslims appeared, the king instructed his bishops to lay out their scriptures around him. The king then asked the Muslims, 'What is this religion that has caused you to leave your people, not to adopt my religion, nor the religion of any other nation?' Jaʿfar ibn Abū Tālib was the one to respond, saying, 'O king, we were a people steeped in ignorance (*jāhiliyah*). We worshiped idols and ate the flesh of dead animals. We engaged in immoral acts, severed family ties, and mistreated our neighbors. The strong among us oppressed the weak. We lived like this until Allah sent us a Messenger from among ourselves, whose lineage, truthfulness, honesty, and purity we knew well. He called us to worship Allah alone and to renounce what we and our ancestors used to worship besides Him, namely stones and idols. He

instructed us to be truthful and trustworthy, to care for our relatives, to be good to our neighbors, and to avoid prohibited acts and bloodshed. He forbade us from committing immoral deeds, lying, unlawfully consuming the wealth of orphans, and falsely accusing chaste women. He commanded us to worship Allah alone, without associating any partners with Him, to perform prayers, to give *zakāh* (charitable alms), and to fast.' Jaʿfar continued to describe the teachings of Islam and then said, 'So we believed in him and followed him. We worshiped Allah alone and did not associate any partners with Him. We avoided what was forbidden and engaged in what was lawful. But our people attacked us. They tortured us and tried to force us to return to idol worship and the immoral behavior we used to practice. When they overpowered us, persecuted us, and stood between us and our faith, we came to your land, choosing you over others. O king, we sought your protection and hoped not to suffer oppression in your land.' The king then asked, 'Do you have any of the revelations that he (i.e., Muhammad ﷺ) received from Allah?' 'Yes,' Jaʿfar replied. The king said, 'Then recite it to me.' Jaʿfar began to recite verses from Sūrat Maryam (Chapter Mary). By Allah, upon hearing Jaʿfar's recitation, the king wept until his beard was wet, and so did his bishops. The king then declared, 'This revelation and what Jesus brought have emerged from the same lamp (i.e., the same source).' Turning to the two Makkans, he said, 'Leave! I will never hand them (the Muslims) over to you, and no one can compel me to do so.'"

Umm Salamah's narration continues, describing how the two Makkans attempted to create conflict between al-Najāshī and the Muslims, but without success. ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀs, one of the Makkans, resorted to his final tactic against the emigrants: exploiting religious differences. He informed al-Najāshī that the Muslims held a different belief about Jesus than the Christians. Upon hearing this, the king summoned the Muslims to question them about their beliefs concerning Jesus. The Muslims decided to be forthright and tell the king exactly what they believed. Jaʿfar (رضي الله عنه), the leader of the Muslims, stepped forward to respond to the king's inquiry, "What do you say about Jesus?" the king asked. Jaʿfar replied, "We say what our Prophet has brought from Allāh: he (Jesus) is the servant of Allāh, His Messenger, and His (created) spirit and Word[25] that He cast upon Mary the Virgin." The king reacted, "By Allāh, Jesus is no different from what you have said." When the bishops heard this, they snorted. The king said to them, "By God, that is true, even if you snort." Then he said to us, "Go! You are safe in my kingdom. Whoever abuses you will be punished; whoever abuses you will be punished."

In the end, the Makkan delegation lost its case, and its two members returned to Makkah disappointed and empty-handed. Eventually, the Makkan delegation lost its case, and its two members returned to Makkah disappointed and empty-handed.

Umm Salamah's narration then shifts to a different scene, where the king of Abyssinia, al-Najāshī, is fighting a rival who has challenged his rule. It is interesting to read how the Muslims watched these events closely, as their survival in Ethiopia depended on al-Najāshī's victory. They feared that if al-Najāshī were overthrown, his rival might not be as kind to them. According to Umm Salamah, the Muslims were on one side of the Nile while the battle took place on the opposite side. To find out the

[25] Jesus is called the Word of God because he was created miraculously without a father when God said '*be',* and there he was. (See Qur'an, 3:59, 4:171- 172, 19:16-36).

outcome of the battle, they decided to send their youngest man, al-Zubair ibn al-ʿAwwām, who volunteered to bring back news. Umm Salamah said, "They (the Muslims) inflated a leather canteen, which al-Zubair took, placing it beneath his chest to swim across the Nile. He reached the other side where the battle was raging and witnessed what was happening. Meanwhile, we prayed for al-Najāshī to be victorious over his enemy and to secure his rule. Ultimately, the king triumphed, solidifying his control over his kingdom (al-Habashah), and we remained under his protection in the best conditions until we returned to the Prophet of Allāh (ﷺ) in Makkah."

Umm Salamah's narration ends here, but the story of the emigrants does not. Umm Salamah was among those whom the Prophet called back to Makkah so they could migrate to Madīnah before him, especially after it became clear that Madīnah would be his destination. This decision was solidified after the Prophet met secretly with a delegation from Madīnah, who promised to support him and the message of Islam. However, some Muslims remained in Abyssinia, gradually returning to Madīnah over time, with the last of them arriving by the year 7 AH. This narration of Umm Salamah was collected by Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Ibn Hishām through Muhammad ibn Ishāq.[26]

The Islamic presence in Abyssinia lasted from 8 BH until the year 7 AH. As mentioned earlier, many of the emigrants returned to Makkah when they heard about the migration to Madīnah. A total of 33 men, 4 women, and 2 children (born in Abyssinia) went back to Makkah before the Prophet's migration to Madīnah, while the rest of the emigrants stayed in Abyssinia. After the Muslim victory in the Battle of Badr (2 AH), five Muslims left Abyssinia for Madīnah.[27] The remaining emigrants stayed in Abyssinia, where they were later joined by Yemeni Muslims whose ship had been diverted by wind to the Eritrean coast while they were attempting to migrate to Madīnah.[28] These Yemenis, along with the remaining Muslims, eventually migrated to Madīnah in the year 7 AH.

Being away from their beloved city of Makkah for the first time, the emigrants in Abyssinia went through a difficult time. The following narration describes how one woman felt about the entire experience. Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (ﷺ) reported, "We were in Yemen when we heard about the migration of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). We set out as emigrants to join him. I was accompanied by my two brothers, with me being the youngest; one was Abū Burdah, and the other was Abū Ruhm, along with some others. Some say we were fifty-two or fifty-three in total. We embarked on a boat, which sailed to the land of the Negus in Abyssinia. There, we met Jaʿfar ibn Abū Tālib and his companions. Jaʿfar said, 'Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) has sent us here and commanded us to stay. You should stay with

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[26] ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyah* (The Prophet's Biography), (Cairo: Dār al-Rayyān li-al-Turāth, 1987), 1:360-364.

[27] Those were Abū al-Rūm ibn ʿUmaīr, Salīt ibn ʿAmr, Abū Qaīs ibn al-Hārith, ʿĀmir ibn Waqqās and ʿUtbah ibn Mas'ūd. (Shākir, *ma'a al-hijrah*, 78). Also, al-Bukhārī related to ʿĀ'ishah bint Abī Bakr saying that most of the emigrants in Abyssinia returned to Makkah before the Prophet's migration to Madinah took place. (See al-ʿAsqalānī, *fath al-bārī,* vol.7, *hadīth* no. 3905).

[28] Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, the leader of the Yemeni emigrants said, 'The news of the Prophet's migration to Madinah reached us while we were in Yemen. So we went on board of a ship, but our ship took us away to (the land of) al-Najāshī. There we met Ja'far (ibn Abū Tālib) and stayed with him until we came (to Madinah) by the time when the Prophet (peace be upon him) had conquered (the city of) Khaībar. The Prophet said (to us), "O you people of the ship! You will have (the reward of) two migrations."' (See *fath al-bārī*, vol.7, *hadīth* no.3876).

us.' So, we stayed there. Later, we returned to Madīnah and met Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) when Khaibar had already been conquered. Although the Prophet (ﷺ) typically did not allocate shares to those absent during the conquest of Khaibar, he made an exception for us, the people of the boat. Some among the other emigrants said to us, 'We preceded you in migration.' When Asmā' bint 'Umais, who had migrated to Abyssinia and returned with us, visited Hafsah, the wife of the Prophet (ﷺ), 'Umar was also present. Seeing Asmā', 'Umar asked, 'Who is she?' Hafsah replied, 'She is Asmā', the daughter of 'Umais.' Umar remarked, 'She is an Abyssinian and a sea-woman.' Asmā' responded, 'Yes, it is so.' 'Umar then said, 'We preceded you in migration and thus have more right to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) than you do.' This upset Asmā', and she said, 'Umar, what you say is not true. By Allah, you were with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), who fed the hungry among you and instructed the ignorant, while we were far away in Abyssinia, among the enemies, all for the sake of Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ). By Allah, I will not eat or drink until I tell Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) what you have said. We endured constant hardship and fear in that land. I will speak to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) about it.' When the Prophet (ﷺ) arrived, she said, 'O Messenger of Allah, 'Umar says so-and-so.' The Prophet (ﷺ) replied, 'His right is not greater than yours. For him and his companions, there was one migration, but for you, the people of the boat, there are two migrations.' Asmā' said, 'I saw Abū Mūsā and the people of the boat coming to me in groups, asking me to repeat this hadith, for nothing was more pleasing or significant to them than this.'" Abū Burdah reported that Asmā' said, "I saw Abū Musā asking me to repeat this hadith to him again and again."[29]

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Based on the hadith methodology we discussed earlier as a standard for judging the authenticity of hadiths and historical events, I will address two issues related to the emigration of Muslims to Abyssinia. These issues are the conversion of al-Najāshī to Islam and the conversion of a Muslim man, 'Ubaidullāh ibn Jahsh, to Christianity while living in Abyssinia.

1. The conversion of the king of Abyssinia, al-Najāshī, Ashamah (read As-hamah **أَصْحَمَة**) ibn Abjar, has sparked debate between Muslims and non-Muslims. Many Western historians reject the idea that al-Najāshī ever converted to Islam, either publicly or secretly, following his contact with the Muslim emigrants from Makkah. Narrations about the king's conversion to Islam are dismissed as 'legends' by J. S. Trimingham, a claimed expert on Islam in Africa,[30] while Paul B. Henze refers to these narrations as 'allegations.'[31] In his book, Henze directs readers to Haggai Erlich's *Ethiopia and the Middle East* for 'a discussion of the allegations...'[32]

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[29] Muslim, 2503.

[30] Trimingham, J. Spencer. *Islam in Ethiopia*, 2d ed. London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, London, 1965, p.46

[31] Paul B Henze, *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia*, (New York: Palgrave, 2000; reprint, 2001), 42, n. no.38.

[32] Ibid., p. 43. The first chapter of Erlich's book contains many historical and religious errors. For example, Erlich counts Barakah Umm Ayman, who was a free Abyssinian female slave living in Makkah, among the emigrants to Abyssinia of the first wave! It is well known among Muslim historians that Umm Ayman did not migrate to Abyssinia at any time of her life. Muhammad ibn Ishāq, who lists all the names of the emigrants in his *Sīrah*, does not even mention Umm Ayman at all among the emigrants.

The conversion of al-Najāshī to Islam did not significantly impact the future of Islam in Abyssinia, as Islam left little lasting impression on the region after the departure of the last Muslims to Madinah in the year 7 AH. In fact, Islam arrived in Ethiopia much later. Had al-Najāshī publicly declared his conversion to Islam, it could have placed the emigrants in a difficult position, leaving them vulnerable to attacks from the Christian population in whose society the king had provided them protection.

Conversely, denying al-Najāshī's conversion to Islam serves little purpose beyond supporting the notion, propagated by some Western scholars, that Islam does not appeal to kings and leaders. This notion is false, as evidenced by the fact that many rulers who received invitations to Islam from the Prophet (ﷺ) in the year 9 AH embraced the faith. Among them were al-Mundhir ibn Sāwā, the ruler of al-Bahrain;[33] the two kings of Oman, Jaifar ibn Jalandī and his brother ʿAbd ibn Jalandī; and the ruler of Yemen, al-Hārith al-Himyarī, along with his two brothers and other regional leaders.[34]

Although al-Najāshī Ashamah showed deep sympathy and respect for the Muslims and their religion, he never publicly announced his conversion to Islam to the subjects of his kingdom. In fact, his conversion was kept secret and only became known after his death. This understanding is derived from authentic narrations in a series of hadiths collected by the *muhaddithūn*. These hadiths state that when Ashamah, the Negus of Abyssinia, died, the Prophet informed his Companions in Madīnah of his death and performed a funeral prayer for him. According to Islamic *sharīʿah*, a funeral prayer is performed *only* for Muslims and cannot be performed for non-Muslims. Abū Hurairah (رضي الله عنه) said, "The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) announced the death of al-Najāshī on the same day he had died. He (the Messenger) went out with his Companions to the *musallā* (where the funeral prayer was performed) and said '*Allāh-u Akbar*' four times."[35]

In another narration, the Prophet (ﷺ) asked his Companions to pray and ask for forgiveness for their 'pious'[36] 'brother,'[37] the king of al-Habashah. The following authentic hadith clearly states that the Muslims in Madinah were not aware of the conversion of al-Najāshī Ashamah to Islam. Anas ibn Mālik related that when the news of al-Najāshī's death came,[38] the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said (to his Companions), "Pray for him." They exclaimed, "O Messenger of Allāh! We pray for an Abyssinian who is not even a Muslim!" Then, Allāh, the Exalted, revealed (to the Messenger the verse):

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[33] The historical Bahrain extended from the city of al-Basra, in Iraq today, to Oman, including the current kingdom of al-Bahrain. In another word, Bahrain covered the whole region of eastern Arabia except Oman. See al-Hamwī, *mu'jam al-buldān*, 243 (www.alwaraq.com).

[34] Mahmūd Shākir, *al-tārikh al-islāmi*, 2:318-19; and Ibn Tūlūn al-dimashqī, *i'lām al-Sa'ilīn*, 2d ed. (Damascus: Mu'assasah al-Risālah, 1987), 19-22

[35] Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj, *al-Jāmi' al-saḥīḥ*, (Beirūt: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah), 3:55. Also, this narration was collected by al-Bukhārī, Abū Dāūūd and al-Nasā'ī in their books.

[36] The companion Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh said, 'When al-Najāshī died, the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "today a pious man has died. So stand up and pray for your brother Ashamah.'" (See Bukhārī, 5:143, no.360).

[37] Ibn al-Hajjāj, 3:55.

[38] Obviously, the news about Ashamah's death came through divine revelation since it was announced on the same day Ashamah died.

﴿وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَمَن يُؤْمِنُ بِٱللَّهِ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَٰشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا يَشْتَرُونَ بِـَٔايَٰتِ ٱللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ ۗ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ ﴿١٩٩﴾﴾

﴿Some People of the Book do believe in Allāh and what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down to them, acting reverently towards Allāh. They do not sell Allāh's signs for a paltry price: those will receive their wages from their Lord; Allāh is Prompt in reckoning.﴾ [Qur'an, 3:199].[39]

As a matter of fact, the narrations about Ashamah's public conversion are not authentic. One such narration states, "The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) had ordered us to go to the land of al-Najāshī… Al-Najāshī said, 'I testify that he (i.e., Muhammad) is the Messenger of Allāh about whom Jesus foretold. Had it not been for my responsibility to my kingdom, I would have gone to him and carried his leather shoes.'" However, al-Albānī, a renowned *muhaddith* (d. 2002), points out that the *sanad* (chain of narration) of this hadith is weak (*daʿīf*), and therefore, the hadith is not acceptable.[40]

2. The conversion of ʿUbaidullāh ibn Jahsh and other Muslims to Christianity made headlines in Western writings. However, the records, which will be discussed below, indicate that the only convert to Christianity among the emigrants was ʿUbaidullāh ibn Jahsh. This contradicts Trimingham's claim that "[s]ome of them, however, had become Christians and were therefore the first converts from Islam to Christianity… One of these converts, ʿUbaidullāh ibn Jahsh…"[41] Trimingham cites Sir Muir, who, in turn, refers to Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah* regarding ʿUbaidullāh ibn Jahsh's conversion to Christianity.[42] Strangely, neither Trimingham nor Muir provide any evidence of others who converted to Christianity besides ʿUbaidullāh. In fact, Islamic sources mention no one other than ʿUbaidullāh ibn Jahsh among the emigrants who converted to Christianity. Historians, both Muslim and Western, have accepted the account of ʿUbaīdullāh as an authentic story from the *Sīrah* of Muhammad ibn Ishāq, which Ibn Hishām included in his work, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyah* (The Prophet's Biography). The story states that Ibn Ishāq reported that Muhammad ibn Jaʿfar ibn al-Zubair told him, based on the authority of (his father) ʿUrwah ibn al-Zubair, that ʿUbaidullāh ibn Jahsh went with the Muslims to Abyssinia as

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[39] Muhammad Nasir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *silsilah al-aḥādīth al-saḥīḥah* (The Series of Authentic *Hadīths*), (Riyādh: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1991), vol. 7, *hadīth* no. 3044. This *hadīth* was collected by al-Nasā'ī, al-Bazzār, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī Hātim and Ibn Mardūyah. See Muhammad ibn 'Alī al-Shawkānī, *fatḥ al-qdīr* (Damascus: Dār Kathīr, 1994), 1:476; and Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabārī, *jami' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āyī al-qur'an* (The Clear Understanding of the Verses of the Qur'an), (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 3:218.

[40] Muhammad Nasir al- Albānī, *ḍa'īf sunan abī Daūūd* (The Unauthentic *Hadīths* in Sunan Abī Dāūūd), (Beirūt: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1991), 325, *hadīth* no. 704.

[41] Trimingham, 45

[42] As an evidence of 'Ubaīd's conversion to Christianity, Muir quotes a story from Ibn Hishām's *sīrah* that Ibn Ishāq was told by Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn al-Zubaīr that, "Ubaīd Allāh ibn Jahsh, after he became a Christian, used to pass by the Companions of the Prophet when they were there in Abyssinia and say…' Based on *hadīth* methodology, this *khabar* is weak, for the fact that Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn al-Zubaīr (d. after 110 AH), who was trustworthy, did not relate the story or hear it from anyone who witnessed the incident or heard it from one companion of the Prophet.

a Muslim but converted to Christianity once he reached Abyssinia. When he passed by the Prophet's Companions, he would say, "We now see clearly, but you are still blinking."[43]

When we examine this *khabar* or narration, we find that its *sanad* (chain of narrators) includes three narrators: Muhammad ibn Ishāq, Muhammad ibn Ja'far, and 'Urwah ibn al-Zubāir. All these narrators are considered reliable. However, 'Urwah ibn al-Zubāir was not a Companion and did not witness this incident, nor did he claim to have heard it from any Companion. According to hadith methodology, this *khabar* is *mursal* and falls under the category of weak hadith.[44] This leads us to conclude that the story of 'Ubaidullāh's conversion to Christianity is at least doubtful, not to mention the alleged conversion of "some" immigrants, for which there is no evidence whatsoever.

Ironically, Muslim historians and bibliographers have embedded 'Ubaidullāh's story in their works without questioning its authenticity.[45] In fact, when it comes to *sīrah*, most Muslim historians tend to be lenient in accepting major works like those of Ibn Ishāq and Ibn Hishām without much criticism, as long as the records in these works do not contradict established facts in Islam. On the other hand, hadith scholars are generally more critical, not only regarding hadiths related to Islamic rulings but also those concerning the lives of the Prophet and his Companions.

Another narration, transmitted by Ibn Mandah in *Ma'rifat al-Sahābah*, p.952, it says, "Muhammad ibn 'Abdullāh ibn Ma'rūf al-Asbahānī narrated to us, saying, 'Ubaid ibn 'Abd al-Wāhid narrated to us, saying, Sa'īd ibn 'Ufayr narrated to us, saying, al-Laith narrated to us from 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Khālid ibn Musāfir, from al-Zuhrī, from 'Urwah, from 'Ā'ishah, who said, 'Ubaidullāh ibn Jahsh emigrated with Umm Habībah bint Abū Sufyān, who was his wife, to the land of Abyssinia. When he arrived in Abyssinia, he converted to Christianity. As death approached him, he made a will to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ then married Umm Habībah and sent her with the Negus and Sharhabīl ibn Hasnah, who gifted her to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).'" However, 'Ubaid ibn 'Abd al-Wāhid was contradicted by someone more trustworthy and knowledgeable in the hadith of al-Zuhrī, namely, Muhammad ibn Yahyā al-Dhuhalī. In his narration, there is no mention of the phrase "he converted to Christianity." Instead, it states, "When he arrived in Abyssinia, he fell ill." This was also narrated by Ibn Hibbān, as mentioned in his book *al-Ihsān*, 13/385-386, "Ibn Khuzaymah narrated to us, saying, Muhammad ibn Yahyā al-Dhuhalī narrated to us, saying, Sa'īd ibn Kathīr ibn 'Ufair narrated to us, saying, al-Laith narrated to us from Ibn Musāfir, from Ibn Shihāb, from 'Urwah, from 'Ā'ishah, who said, 'Ubaidullāh ibn Jahsh emigrated with Umm Habībah bint Abū Sufyān, who was his wife, to the land of Abyssinia. When he arrived in Abyssinia, he fell ill. As death approached him, he made a *will* to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ then married Umm Habībah, and the Negus sent her with Sharhabīl ibn Hasnah.'" Shaikh Shu'aib al-Arnā'ūt commented on *al-Ihsān*, "Its chain of narration is authentic according to the conditions of al-Bukhārī. The narrators are those

[43] Ibn Hishām, 3: 310. Trimingham reports this *khabar* in his book *Islam in Ethiopia* without paying much attention to its chain of narrators. He says, 'Ibn Ishāq said, M.[uhmmad] [i]b[n] Ja'far [i]b[n] az-Zubaīr to me,' without mentioning the third narrator who is 'Urwa ibn al-Zubair, the father of the second narrator. (See Trimingham, 46).

[44] A *hadith mursal* is a *hadith* where a Companion (*sahābhi*), who is the one who heard or witness the events, is dropped from the chain of narrators (*sanad*).

[45] Tahhān, 72

accepted by the two Shaikhs (i.e., al-Bukhari and Muslim), except for Muhammad ibn Yahyā al-Dhuhalī, who is a narrator in al-Bukhari's collection."

In his *Sharh Mushkil al-Āthār*, Abū Jaʿfar al-Tahāwī narrated with his *sanad* to ʿUrwah that Umm Habibah was married to ʿUbaidullāh ibn Jahsh, who had migrated to Abyssinia, *where he passed away*. The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, then married Umm Habibah while she was still in the land of Abyssinia. The Negus arranged her marriage to him, provided a dowry of four thousand (dirhams) on his behalf, and sent her to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, accompanied by Shurahbil ibn Hasanah. All her wedding arrangements were provided by the Negus, and the Prophet, peace be upon him, did not send anything to her. The dowry of the Prophet's wives was usually four hundred dirhams.[46]

Also, Abū Dāwūd transmitted from the way of 'Urwah ibn al-Zubair who narrated on the authority of Umm Habībah (ﷺ) that she said that she was married to ʿUbaīdullāh ibn Jahsh; and after he had died in the land of Abyssinia, al-Najāshī married her to the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and gave her a dowry (from himself) of 4,000 dirhams, then he sent her to the Messenger of Allāh with Shurahbīl ibn Hasanah (a Companion).[47]

In conclusion, we can confirm that there is no authentic report confirming ʿUbaidullāh's apostasy, let alone the conversion of some companions to Christianity while residing in Abyssinia, as some claim.

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[46] See *Sharh Mushkil al-Hadīth*, vol. 13, hadith no. 5061, p.60. Shaikh Sh. Arnāūt authenticated this hadith and listed other transmitters: Ahmad, 6/427; Abū Dāwūd, 2107; Hākim, 2/181; Nasāī, 6/119; Tabarānī, 23/402; Baihaqī, 7/232, with different *sanads*.

[47] Muhammad Nasir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Sahīh Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (The Authentic *Hadiths in Sunan of* Abī Dāwūd) (Beīrūt: al-Maktab al-islāmī, 1989), 2:396, *hadīth* no.1853.

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